

MODERN NOISE, FLUID GENRES: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997-2001. New Perspectives in Southeast Asian Studies. By *Jeremy Wallach*. Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press, 2008. xvi 323 pp. (Tables, B&W photos, illus.) US\$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-299-22900-9; US\$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-299-22904-7.

Wallach's text is a valuable addition to the growing field of Indonesian popular music studies and this study is a welcome counterbalance to ethnomusicologists' historical focus on gamelan traditions. Wallach's work is especially enlightening when read alongside the recent contributions to the field by Baulch and Luvaas. While at first seeming over-ambitious, Wallach's technique of comparing the very different genres of *dangdut*, pop and underground (metal, punk) musics allows him to approach issues of class, gender and globalization in rather sophisticated ways.

The social science research agenda on Indonesia has historically focused on the nation's socio-economic extremes: the majority restricted to the poverty-stricken villages and urban slums versus the elite power brokers entrenched in metropolitan high-rises and government offices. The political changes brought about since an era of decentralization and democratization began in 1998 have illuminated the historically neglected cultural zone between the elite ground of global fashions and localized traditional practices. The musicians and fans that represent the primary subjects of Wallach's project represent an emerging middle class of educated, but hardly wealthy, youth who have seized upon emergent electoral democracy and defied the attribution of "depoliticized floating mass" assigned to their parents. This is a complex middle zone in which different aesthetic worlds intermingle and global aesthetic currents flow with particular strength. In this meeting place of active aesthetic flux the multidirectional circulation of global aesthetic forms and the reinvention of musical meaning serves as a virtual terrain for social, aesthetic and religious reform.

Wallach analyzes in detail the quotidian activity of hanging out (*nongkrong*) in poor and middle-class life in Indonesia. This is a welcome antidote to the anthropological preoccupation with ceremony and spectacle in Indonesia. We are presented with fruitful and interesting investigations of previously neglected cultural artifacts, such as the "Thank-you Lists" found on locally produced cassettes. However, Wallach's approach towards ethnographic thick description may, at moments, become a bit too thick for some readers and we tend in spots to get more detail than image, more trees than forest. This slight shortcoming, if it can be called such, is made up for in the tight concluding chapter.

The text is focused primarily on three general themes:

- 1) Globalization and the nation: Wallach is primarily concerned with the interaction of these two categories with the local and the development

of cosmopolitan identities. Ethnicity is an important category here—one which could have been theorized more fully, especially its implications for reimagining the local from a national frame. Importantly, Wallach analyzes the Indonesian *acara*, secular social events, as a bringing together of local, national and global forms.

- 2) Sociality: Wallach stresses the “ethic of sociality” prevalent in Indonesia; however the suggestion that popular musical activity promotes harmony across “ethnic, regional and other social boundaries” (166) is sometimes overstressed. The result is to reify the power of class (vaguely figured) in this context and to downplay the assertion of individuality and personal expression in popular music scenes. While Wallach makes an excellent case, we might be wary of the unintended consequence of amplifying prior anthropological stereotypes of Indonesian culture as straightforward *communitas*. None of these forms completely erases social distinctions, as is implied at moments in the text (although this is problematized, 254).
- 3) Social class as articulated by genre. Wallach here applies Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital in his discussion of *gengsi* (status consciousness), and the perceived inferiority of local globalized (Anglo-American) genres (i.e., rock) versus their Indonesian versions. Here Wallach is concerned with, on the one hand, the ways in which popular music furthers processes of urban social differentiation, and on the other with the engendering of *communitas* through reception. *Communitas* is primarily associated with lower-class performance traditions such as *dangdut* (and the ethos of the Sukarno era), whereas lifestyle (*gaya hidup*) is associated with upper-class voluntary identity formation through the selective adoption of Westernized commodities and popular music (associated with the ethos of the New Order, Suharto era). The dialectic between these two processes isn’t always entirely clear, although Wallach does theorize the meanings generated when, for instance, working class musics such as *dangdut* are performed in upper-class *pop* settings.

To a lesser extent, Wallach focuses on issues of gender and hybridity (both in identity formation and musical style). Both issues are discussed through rich ethnographic detail and fully theorized. Wallach is most articulate and powerful in his conclusion, where he more rigorously theorizes his subject without attempting to create a totalizing theoretical framework which would narrow his conclusions. Fortunately, Wallach’s spheres of interest and their interpenetration are allowed the complex ambiguity we experience in the world of Indonesian popular music.